

June 23, 1969

**Note from Department Head Ruete, 'Meeting with
the Bonn Xinhua Representative on June 13, 1969'**

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Summary:

A West German diplomat meets with a Xinhua correspondent to discuss China's relations with Bonn

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Note from Department Head Ruete

Strictly confidential

June 23, 1969

Subject: Meeting with the Bonn Xinhua Representative on June 13, 1969[1]

a) Following authorizations from the State Secretary on May 16, 1969,[2] as well as on June 2, 1969, I invited the head of the Bonn Xinhua office, Mr. Xiang Qian, on June 13, 1969 to an informal conversation about the German-Sino relationship. Mr. Xiang was in company of his interpreter, Guang Liwen; present from the German side was also section head II A 8, VLR I Wilhelm Hoffmann. The conversation was held in a very friendly atmosphere.

I limited this first talk with an official representative of China to three subjects:

The German China policy.

The German Asia policy.

German-Chinese trade.

1. German China policy.

After introductory remarks about my previous stays in China and inquiries about Mr. Xiang's living and working conditions here [in Bonn], I began the conversation with a nod to the statement by the Federal Chancellor about German-Chinese relations[3] during his visit to Tokyo (May 20, 1969). Maybe the statement was misunderstood by the Chinese side.

The peoples of Germany and China can look back to a long tradition of friendly relations. We are fully aware to acknowledge the achievements of the great Chinese people as well as China's political relevance. We are interested in normalizing over the course of time our relationship with this largest people on earth. On the other hand, we know that today normalization of German-Chinese relations is not an easy task, due to reasons for which neither China nor Germany is responsible. In this regard we noted with interest and understanding, when Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi stated in 1965[4] and 1966 before foreign journalists in Beijing that in Chinese opinion the time for establishment of official relations between our two countries has not yet matured. Maybe one can also phrase it this way: at this point the question of establishment of official relations is not yet current. This, and nothing else, was what the Federal Chancellor wanted to express with his statement.

One can summarize our position on the German-Chinese relationship this way: We keep an eye on its normalization as a desirable goal, and we ultimately will also think about the establishment of diplomatic relations. In the meantime we do not want to undertake anything that could complicate such normalization.

b) Mr. Xiang seemed to understand the phrase "not want to undertake anything" like that the Chinese side as well should hold back in the same fashion. I clarified that this sentence is supposed to refer to the German position only, and I added we understand and respect the opinion of the Chinese government, namely that China, for whatever reasons, cannot take into consideration at this time steps towards the establishment of official relations.

c) With regard to our position on the German-Chinese relationship I referred to

various official statements, for instance to the Publik interview with the Foreign Minister from December 1968[5] and his interview for Deutschlandfunk radio from March 9, 1969,[6] as well as to the interview with the State Secretary for ZDF television from August 15, 1968.[7] Mr. Xiang confirmed that he is familiar with those three official German statements. Mr. Xiang did not wish to make comments about the subject of German-Chinese relations from his side.

2. a) On the issue of German Asia policy I elaborated that we are an European country and have actual political problems only in Europe. Thus it is natural that the focus of our political interest lies in Europe. On the other side, from the past we have historically developed relations with a couple of Asian countries. However, today we no longer view those from the perspective of the German Empire. As a consequence of our position as an European industrialized country without particular political objectives in Asia, in addition to the general desire for friendly relations with all the peoples of Asia, our activities are primarily directed towards development of trade and the promotion of cultural, economic, and scientific-technological collaboration with those countries that are interested.

b) Mr. Xiang asked whether during his visit to Tokyo the Federal Chancellor also discussed questions of the Sino-German relationship. I replied there was general talk about this subject as well,[8] but that we are free in our decision how we want to arrange our relations with China. When the opportunities for a normalization of German-Chinese relations will arise, we would not present the Japanese with a fait accompli.

c) Mr. Xiang asked the additional question whether we consult about the issue of German-Chinese relations also with our partners in the Western alliance. I confirmed that consultations about political issues are held in the framework of this alliance from time to time. However, for the question of German-Chinese relations the same applies what was said with regard to Japan.

3. a) With regard to German-Chinese trade we proceeded from the assumption that, also according to Chinese opinion, this trade should continue and, if possible, be expanded to the benefit of both peoples. On the other hand, we also respected the Chinese position to conduct this trade for the time being without contractual agreements on government level. However, I repeated at this occasion the already repeatedly expressed willingness of the German side to discuss with the Chinese issues of German-Chinese trade also at an official level. We hold the opinion it could become easier this way to eliminate existing trade impediments or other difficulties. Those are basically unavoidable given the scope of the trade, but we would regret them. I mentioned explicitly that nothing has changed regarding our willingness to "officialize" trade relations; though I clarified that this does not constitute a request to do so.

b) Mr. Xiang did not wish to say anything on this issue. In concluding, he thanked for the opportunity to get my information about the German opinion with regard to Chinese-German relations. When I suggested to continue such conversations some time, he replied the Chinese side would be eager. Mr. Xiang also agreed to the suggestion that no information should be given to the public about the fact of this conversation.

Ruete

VS-Bd. 2821 (I B 4)

[1] The note was drafted by VLR I Wilhelm Hoffmann and forwarded on June 23, 1969 by Department Head Ruete to State Secretary Duckwitz und Foreign Minister Brandt.

It was submitted to Duckwitz on June 24, 1969 who noted in handwriting: "A somewhat one-sided conversation! But maybe Hs[iang] loosens up somewhat at a second occasion. Please information to General Consulate Hongkong.

Was submitted to Brandt on June 28, 1969.

Was re-submitted to Ruete in June 30, 1969 who asked Hoffmann for consultation.

Was re-submitted to Hoffmann on July 2, 1969.

[2] On May 8, 1969 VLR I Hoffmann reported about a talk with Chinese journalist Hsiang Tsien from the day before. Hoffmann assumed "that it will take at least two weeks until Hsiang will receive a first reaction from Beijing to his report". Hoffmann proposed "one should invite him after this grace period to a first talk with [Foreign Ministry Department] D II." State Secretary commented in handwriting: "Yes." VS-Bd. 2821 (I B 4); B 150, File Copies 1969.

[3] Federal Chancellor [Kurt Georg] Kiesinger visited Japan between May 17 and 21, 1969. In an interview with Japanese television he stated about the relationship between the Federal Republic and the People's Republic of China: "We follow with great attention the development of the most populous country on earth, which is about to become a modern industrial power and is in possession of nuclear weapons. We do not intend to establish diplomatic relations with China or undertake preparatory steps in that direction. I also do not have the impression there is an interest on the Chinese side in such a development. We are having trade with China; our businesses are free and search for their markets, this is also the case with regard to China." See note by VLR I Wilhelm Hoffmann of June 11, 1969; VS-Bd. 2821 (I B 4); B 150; File Copies 1969.

[4] On September 29, 1965 the Chinese Foreign Minister told the press in Beijing that conditions do not yet exist for the establishment of trade relations, "since the Federal [FRG] Government has a secret understanding with the 'American aggressors'. Bonn attempts to resurrect militarism in West Germany; this is way it threatens all of Europe." At the same time Chen Yi indicated that there already exist "non-official trade relations" between both states. See the article "Beijing is not Interested in Bonn", Süddeutsche Zeitung, September 30, 1965, p. 2.

[5] For the interview of Foreign Minister Brandt with weekly newspaper "Publik" from December 6, 1968 and the Chinese reaction see document 6.

[6] Foreign Minister Brandt explained the role of the People's Republic of China for the FRG's foreign policy: "We do not have the intention to exploit a Soviet-Chinese clash of interests. We would be foolish to approach the issue this way; the geography cannot be changed – as important as China will be for future developments, for the future development of the world, as certain it is that a settlement of European and thus German issues cannot be accomplished without and against the Soviet Union. Moreover, there are two factors: We have a not quite irrelevant exchange of products with the People's Republic of China – when I say "we", I refer to German business. [...] The second issue reaches far beyond daily policy routine. China, the great Chinese people, will play a role in the decades to come, not just in Asia but also elsewhere in the world; and we actually think that not too much time should pass until the Chinese republic will find its place also in the institutionalized community of states [United Nations]." See Federal Press Office, Overview Radio/Television Commentaries, August 1968.

[7] State Secretary Duckwitz explained that a change in American policy on China will have no consequence for FRG relations with the People's Republic of China. To the question, why the People's Republic of China has been so far excluded from efforts by the Federal Government to normalize relation with the states of the Eastern bloc, Duckwitz responded that no exceptions will be made: "The Chinese side has let us know by more or less official statements that it does not yet see the time have come for a normalization of our mutual relationship. We took note of that and adapted accordingly." See Federal Press Office, Overview Radio/Television Commentaries, August 1968.

[8] See on this subject the talks between Federal Chancellor Kiesinger and Prime Minister Sato on May 19 and 20, 1969; Document 162 and Document 165 [in AAPD volumes].